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published in
Illnes and Healing Alternatives in Western Europe
1997

document version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Chapter 5

Popular Pietism and the language of sickness

Evert Willemsz's conversion, 1622–23

Willem Frijhoff

AN UNCOMMON ORPHAN

During the summer of 1622 and the following winter, the town of Woerden in the province of Holland was a hive of rumours. A sudden sickness, physical troubles and a spiritual experience had stricken a 15-year-old tailor's apprentice, named Evert Willemsz, a native of the town.[1] He claimed to be in communication through an angel with his heavenly Father. The boy lived at the local orphanage together with his elder brother Pieter and two younger half brothers. Evert's family name appears to have been Bogaert, but he never used it other than in its Latin form Bogardus; which is how he was known at Leiden University where he matriculated in 1627, and also after 1633 as a minister of the Dutch Reformed Church on the island of Manhattan in New Netherland (the present-day State of New York).[2]

We know nothing for certain about his parents. Evert lost his natural father, Willem Bogaert, when he was very young. He was educated by his stepfather, Muysevoet, who must have died, like Evert's mother, some years before the boy's spiritual experience, perhaps in the plague year 1617–18.[3] The four brothers were then placed in the town orphanage of Woerden. Members of Evert's stepfather's family are known to have been small artisans, mostly shoemakers, but as no account of any property appears in the administration records of the orphanage, the family was without means. Without parents, without the help of a local family network, without money or property and having an uneducated (though not necessarily illiterate) background, Evert had virtually no opportunities to rise in society. But he had got something else: intelligence and faith.

What happened to Evert Willemsz in 1622–23 is known to us from two contemporary pamphlets which confirm each other and partly repeat the same information.[4] Their editor was Lucas Zas, headmaster of the small local grammar school and an eye witness to the events. However, the pamphlets' true author was Evert himself, for the text of the pamphlets consists for the most part of the messages which he wrote down during his spiritual experience when he was temporarily deaf and dumb. During this time, he communicated through written notes, referred to as 'copies' in the pamphlets. Each slip of paper contained both the questions and the answers in a dialogue with one person who had come to confer with Evert. Other notes contained his spiritual messages, written under the impulsion of an angel's apparition or after his ecstatic experiences. His own version of the summer experience of 1622, written down some weeks afterwards in a long hymn, was also added.

It was not Evert himself but Master Zas who made a coherent story out of the notes, but without any rewriting of Evert's own words and without literary pretensions. The pamphlets were printed immediately. The manuscript of the first pamphlet was hurriedly carried by Master Zas to Utrecht on Friday, 20 January 1623, during Evert's second spiritual experience, when he was still waiting for his redemption. The second manuscript was first checked against Evert's own handwritten notes by the Woerden town council and the church consistory, and then ordered by them to be brought to a zealous Calvinist bookseller in Amsterdam, Marten Jansz Brandt, who published them immediately. Both pamphlets were reprinted at least once, an indication of the public attention which the boy enjoyed for a time.

The decisions taken by the Woerden town council on Evert's behalf demonstrate that we are not dealing with a religious hoax.[5] In fact, the council never ceased to favour him above other pupils. In particular, the orphanage master and school inspector Gerrit Gijsbertsz Vergeer, a wealthy cloth merchant who from the very beginning was one of the leaders of Calvinist orthodoxy in Woerden, appears to have been Evert's mainstay on the council. In 1622 Evert was admitted to the Latin school, four years later the new town organist was instructed to teach him music; in 1627 he was authorized to leave for Leiden University and in 1629 the Woerden scholarship at the theological college at Leiden was granted to him.

Apparently, the events of 1622–23 are strewn with the classical

commonplaces of adolescent conversion; the most direct course to achieving a successful identity, to use Erik Erikson's terms.[6] Evert follows the psychosomatic patterns of what Freudian psychiatrists call a conversion hysteria. However, in reducing his experience to the stereotyped outlines of a psychiatric model, we would lose our hold on the multiple meanings of the event: personal, social, religious and cultural. Besides, the pamphlets were not presented as the exemplary story of a youthful hero who remains above the event and his calling, as we see in the accounts of many other young Protestant religious enthusiasts, some of which date back to before Evert's time.[7] The boy's reluctance to endorse the interpretation of his experience by the authorities, either religious or political, may also be the reason why the story of Evert Willemsz was not later used in edifying literature. It has remained the life story of a real young man, its impact limited to the time period in which it happened.

PHYSICAL DISABILITIES AND HEAVENLY MESSAGES

In the spring of 1622 Evert finished his elementary education and, while living in the orphanage, almost completed his two-year apprenticeship with master tailor Gijsbert Aelbertsz, whom he loved very much for his piety and for their discussions about God's word. This very companionship may well have opened his eyes to his true vocation – not as a tailor, but as a minister.

According to the story in the pamphlet, Evert had been seriously ill for some time. He had barely recovered when other physical phenomena manifested themselves. From 21 to 30 June 1622, he neither ate nor drank (see Appendix). By isolating himself from the community he caused a sensation among the thirty-odd children of this densely populated orphanage, in which all deviations from the everyday routine were welcome. Evert's refusal of the daily aggregation ritual of meals taken in common was the most efficient way to bring him to the attention of both the orphans and the trustees. The pamphlets show clearly how concerned the matron of the orphanage was about his well-being, not to mention her embarrassment about the disorders in the group caused by Evert's dealings with heaven.

This first phase of physical isolation was followed by a second which lasted throughout the summer, from 30 June to 8 September. Evert was stricken deaf and dumb. He could neither speak nor hear and occasionally he lost his sight, 'as also for a long time the proper

use of his reason' (B6).[8] This phase of physical paralysis, with the privation of almost all use of the senses, served as a climax. It suggests a slowly intensifying struggle which led naturally to a new, crucial moment of transition. It prepared Evert for a third, ecstatic phase, which again lasted for nine days, from 8 to 17 September 1622. Evert returned to fasting and still could neither hear nor speak, but this last phase was circumscribed by the double apparition of an angel of the Lord. This points to the true meaning of Evert's experience: communication with heaven. The angel delivered to him a message from the Father (*his* Father): he had to convert people and admonish them to repent, to deliver themselves from their sins. The heavenly origin of the message and the veracity of Evert's encounter with the angel would be proven and legitimated by his deliverance from the physical disabilities with which God had stricken him, and a return to his previous state of health. The angel brought a second message of social conversion for himself, to which we will return later.

After the angel's first appearance, Evert went into a trance-like state and a long period of ecstatic writing. For entire days he wrote his heavenly messages on little slips of paper, mostly simple messages of a repetitious nature:

> Spread the word, spread the word, for God is sore displeased that word of his wondrous works is not spread. Oh spread the word, oh my dear friends, I beg you, spread the word, for God is displeased that his godly things are not communicated throughout the whole world. Spread the word, then, oh spread the word.
>
> (A3)

The message was just as simple as the knowledge of the world which the young tailor's apprentice had acquired. He repeated it throughout the pamphlets: there are good men and bad; God wants the good to repent, so his word must be spread and the signs must be read. As the background to this message, we can detect a very simplified form of belief in double predestination as defended by orthodox Calvinism and confirmed in 1618–19 by the Synod of Dordrecht. It was quite similar to the grassroots form of everyday theological discussion at Woerden which appears in the documents around the denominational struggles of the 1610s and 1620s: the bad are damned and the good are elected. But God will punish even the good if they do not publicly behave as his perfect faithful.[9]

The signs of God's wrath were easy to detect – the repeated plagues, dearth (implying famine) and war (A2–4, B24–6). This traditional liturgical triad (*a peste, fame et bello libera nos, Domine*) was preceded by the 1618 comet ('the rod', A3) as their portent.[10] But the most important sign of all was God's wondrous work in his faithful child Evert Willemsz. Having first stricken him with sickness and deprived him of the use of his bodily functions, He will sovereignly deliver him at the moment chosen by Himself and announced through the angel's intervention. To believe in the truth of Evert's spiritual experience was therefore to believe in God's work with all his elected people. Evert had no doubt whatsoever about his own election. The affliction which God had put upon him was the very proof of his election. God visits the one He loves. Evert felt like Christ; he suffered for his Father, but finally reconciled his will with God's will (Luke 22:42; B7, B10). Evert knew for sure that he was one of the 144,000 elected who would sing the hymn of the Lamb (Apoc. 14:1–5, 15:3; B17–18). But he did not take Christ's place; though he may have been tempted by the role of a godly mediator, he finally remained at his human place, as a messenger and a minister of God.

Evert's texts certainly reveal a form of youthful radicalism that linked up well with the firm positions of the predestinarians and which was more easily satisfied by the pious and straightforward intolerance of orthodox Calvinism than by the political accommodations of Arminian latitudinarianism and humanistic toleration. He did not worry about subtleties such as the why, the when or the how. In his perception, there was no clear distinction between heaven and earth, nor between time and eternity. The present day and the Last Judgment overlapped; the sins were great and punishment was near. However, Evert was not naïve. He followed the apocalyptic mainstream of orthodox Protestantism but kept his eyes fixed upon his own destiny. He willingly used church and civil authority for his divine goal, but refused to become a 'will-less' victim of these powers, as we shall see later. In a rhymed message Evert resumed his position telling us which were the evil ones' sins:

O woe that ever we were born,
So angry is the Lord,
That people will not live
According to God's word . . .
For people now are very full

Of excess and of pride
They give themselves to drunkenness
And adultery besides.
People commit so many sins
That God cannot abide . . .
The Lord will soon come down to us
To punish all the bad.
That is the meaning of the rod [the comet]
So frightfully sad.

(A3)

PERSONAL ACHIEVEMENT

During Evert's first spiritual experience everything remained enclosed within the boundaries of the orphanage. In time, however, his activities drew attention in Woerden, all the more so when the young man found his impresario in Master Zas. Lucas Zas (c.1591–1636), the son of a Gouda schoolmaster, had worked prior to his appointment as a headmaster and precentor at Woerden as a teacher of Latin and French at Utrecht and nearby Montfoort. In addition to the two pamphlets, in 1628 he published a play on parents' responsibility for their children's education and the choice of a profession (*Borgerliicke Huyshoudingh*). The pious play includes a panegyric of the sacred ministry, from which young Evert may have borrowed some traits of his ecclesiastical calling. In 1631, Zas edited a rhymed translation of Juan Luis Vives's life rules, the *Introductio ad veram sapientiam*. In the introductory poems to this edition, he overtly criticized the hypocrisy of the new Calvinist elites. In Zas, Stoa and Bible met each other; humanistic concern went together with orthodox belief and he was Woerden's independent intellectual, the ideal partner for an independent believer.

Zas came running as soon as Evert had him called, collected the messages and had them printed. He understood what happened. Evert had good reason to choose Master Zas. Besides his call to repentance which was meant for outsiders, he had a personal message to share with the headmaster. So, on 17 September, just before his first deliverance:

> I hope that God will release me this night so that I may again hear and again speak: I do not know this by myself, but through the Spirit of God, which will enlighten me . . . If He has the

> power to inflict things upon me, He also has the power to deliver me again: for do we not read in God's word that He made the deaf hear, the blind see, the crippled walk, the dumb speak [Matthew 11:5; 15:30] . . . Does He not then have the power to give back two of my five senses? Oh yes, I have had that trust and I still have it. But when I have recovered my speech and my hearing, it pleases God and the Spirit of God that I go to school until the time has come for me to do the work by which I shall be blessed. I intend then to become a minister and nothing else. Then you shall see what the Spirit of God shall work through me. I must no longer sew, when I have finished my clothes; for it pleases God Almighty and the Spirit of God that such shall no longer be my work. I must fear the Lord, as the angel of the Lord has commanded me, and that I must do.
>
> (B11)

Evert's corporal and spiritual experiences, his sickness and his ecstasy, made him aware of his real vocation, the sacred ministry. He used the impact which the event made on the local community to achieve this calling and to turn his life in another direction. But to be credible, it had to be legitimized by higher authority. This legitimation, announced by an angel of the Lord, was to occur by a ritual of deliverance. Since it adopted the symbolic language of the community, it would not only point to heaven, but restore the boy to his social group. Sickness and health were therefore not only metaphors of a spiritual destiny, but also instruments of social approval. For Evert, the process of healing was his supernatural calling made visible to man. Healing was not simply a personal benefit, but could be a sign of heaven meant to change the course of individual and social life.

Evert's first deliverance took place nine days after the beginning of his ecstatic experience. Was this a spiritual metaphor for the nine months of pregnancy, previous to his rebirth as a converted Christian in the Pietistic and Puritan spiritual tradition?[11] Evert himself spoke of his 'laying down the old Adam, in order to begin a new life, in all virtue and godliness' (B8). Since he adopts here the very terms of the Pietistic idiom, we may certainly conclude that he was also acquainted with the central themes of its spirituality and in particular with the spiritual symbolism of illness and recovery; illness was closely linked to sin, recovery to conversion from a sinful life to the regeneration of the old Adam as a true Christian, under

the exclusive impulsion of the Holy Ghost. No magic, no demonology. Evert's devil was no more than God's biblical opponent in hell.

Evert was then spiritually reborn in an accelerated process, just as he had been physically born 15 years earlier. In the Almighty God, who caused him to be reborn, he recognized his new father. The place of his rebirth was the orphanage, where the orphans, rector and matron – who was addressed by Evert affectionately as 'my mummy' and indeed seems to have been a new mother to him – were standing around him and praying. They sustained his spiritual birth pains in singing together Psalm 100, as he had predicted in one of his notes some days before. Carried away by the dynamics of the ritual, all of a sudden Evert was singing with them. He had recovered his ability to hear and speak and was now completely his old self, but reborn as a new Adam. Three days later, the magistracy of Woerden, convinced by God's own support of Evert's words, authorized him to leave the tailor's shop and, without having to earn his own living, to attend the Latin school, following his self-chosen adviser Zas.

Thus, while his messages had from the very first moment a universal goal, Evert's first deliverance chiefly served his own, personal achievement. It was God's legitimation of a career turn which would otherwise have been virtually unthinkable for a poor orphan without any fortune or family. Evert needed protection at the right point. His heavenly recovery from a godly affliction procured him two powerful friends: headmaster Zas, who from that moment acted as his spiritual mentor; and councillor Vergeer, who as orphanage master and school inspector was in charge of the orphan's material well-being and education. Both men gave him their firm support over the years.

THE WOERDEN COMMUNITY

In itself, Evert's message was of course not sufficient to win the unconditional trust of all the people around him, especially since, three years after the National Synod of Dordrecht had established Calvinist orthodoxy, few cities in Holland were torn apart by religious conflict as much as Woerden. As a matter of fact, Evert's spiritual dealings provoked scepticism and resistance in the town. As the boy himself reminds us, critics grumbled that they would beat the deaf and dumbness out of him:

They have called out with pride,
And still cry noisily
That they might punish me,
And beat me terribly
So that to me again
Speech and hearing be given.
Oh woe, oh woe such people,
For God knows up in heaven!

(B34)

Woerden was not in all respects an average Dutch town. Its position on the Rhine made it a strategic place, provided with a garrison. Apart from its market function, Woerden possessed many tile and brick yards along its two rivers, which employed most of the town's population of about 3,500. But Woerden was an utterly divided town, torn apart by three competing confessions: Lutheranism, liberal Arminianism and orthodox Calvinism. Lutheranism had invaded Woerden almost by accident, and when in 1572 the town joined the rebels under the prince of Orange, it was on the express condition that the free exercise of the Confession of Augsburg be guaranteed. However, the rebellious States-General started an active policy of Calvinization, and by 1602 Calvinism had become the only official religion in a still mainly Lutheran town. Soon Calvinism itself was torn in two bitterly opposing factions. From 1617 the Arminians, who by then dominated the town council (and had sole use of the church) had to face public opposition from a dissenting orthodox consistory supported by a steadily increasing number of town councillors and by one of the two burgemeesters. By the end of September 1618, the *stadhouder*, Prince Maurits, dismissed the Arminian members of the magistracy and replaced them with orthodox Calvinists. They took over the church as well. The following year, the Synod of Dordrecht formally condemned the Arminians and cut short the languishing dialogue with the Lutherans.

The Arminians offered active resistance. They were particularly numerous among the labourers in the brick and tile yards, rough customers who inspired the magistracy with terror. The fear of a popular insurrection brought the town council to impose radical repression, with the active help of the States of Holland. By 1622–23 the Lutherans still formed about a third of the population and the Arminians accounted for more than 40 per cent, though

they were the poorest. The Calvinists, meanwhile, made up approximately a quarter of the population, but they were in a leading position in the town and countryside, many of them being social climbers. At this time, the opposition between the three factions was sharper than ever before. The Arminians were heavily fined for their conventicles and the Lutherans for keeping up their own rituals: christening and marrying at home, and preaching at funeral services. The two Arminian ministers were forced to leave the town, while one of the new Calvinist ministers, Henricus Alutarius, assaulted the Lutherans in 1623 with a theological treatise proving that Luther had been a true Calvinist and that his successors had perverted the true (Calvinist) meaning of the Confession of Augsburg. Two years earlier, he published a small Reformed catechism for the orthodox education of the local youth. Confronted with the two oppositional groups, who both claimed their seniority and their good faith, the Calvinists badly needed a justification of their rights.

In this religious landscape Evert's spiritual experience naturally acquired special meaning. In fact, the question is twofold. Where did he stand himself, and which religious party took him as an emblem? The two questions are, of course, interrelated, but there was room for manoeuvre and Evert did not hesitate to seize this opportunity. We do not know for sure if his parents were orthodox Calvinists, but the Woerden orphanage, founded just after the beginnings of Calvinist penetration, functioned as one of the main agencies of Calvinization in the town. Evert's elder brother Cornelis Bogaert married the sister of a radical young Calvinist, Cornelis Paludanus, who after actively combating Arminianism at Woerden, taught himself theology. He was admitted as a candidate for the ministry in the very months of Evert's ecstasy, and in 1625 acquired a parish near Woerden. The two ministers, Everhardus Bogardus (as a student and a preacher Evert Willemsz used this Latinized name) and Cornelis Paludanus were made guardians to the children of Cornelis Bogaert in 1636. Paludanus's fervour may have inspired young Evert, who was clever enough to reject the difficult way of a self-taught theologian and therefore claim his access to the Latin school. Evert's half brother Pieter Muysevoet became an orthodox schoolmaster at the nearby village of Linschoten, and Evert himself obtained his ministry at New Amsterdam as a favourite of the orthodox party within the Amsterdam consistory, which in those years decided on appointments to the overseas churches.

In fact, the three brothers must have been closely akin to the zealous Calvinist minister, Vincent Muysevoet or – Dutchified – Meusevoet (1560–1624). This minister was the son of a Flemish shoemaker who, as a convinced Calvinist, had fled into exile in Norwich, England in 1568. Vincent went back to Holland in 1586 with the new Calvinist governor, the Earl of Leicester. He served first as a minister at Zevenhoven near Woerden, then at Schagen near Alkmaar where he terrorized the Arminians. He has some fame in the history of Dutch Calvinism because of his work as a cultural broker. Between 1598 and his death in 1624 he translated more than 30 Puritan and Pietistic treatises from English into Dutch, including virtually all the works of the famous Puritan divine William Perkins (1558–1602) and some of King James I.[12] He was largely responsible for the introduction of Puritan Pietism into the Netherlands.

The second marriage of Evert's mother with a Muysevoet must have made Vincent Evert's uncle, hence Evert's acquaintance with the Pietistic idiom and the Puritan doctrine of regeneration. It was probably no accident that Meusevoet's second English translation, in 1599, was that of Perkins's treatise on sickness and death.[13]

PUBLIC LEGITIMATION

With this spiritual genealogy in mind, Evert's second ecstasy may receive a new interpretation. Spiritual experience is, of course, embedded in social traditions of bodily control and physical constraint. Prayer, fasting, visions, celestial messages and miraculous healing adopt traditional forms of communication between heaven and man.[14] Such forms, stored in what we may call the 'social memory' are prerequisites for the production of spiritual experience by the subject. But they also make it recognizable for the target group which shares with the subject a network of traditions and meanings, and form with him or her what Fish has called an 'interpretive community'.[15] In accentuating the basic features of such traditions, the theatrical expression of spiritual experience is a guarantee for its appropriate transmission, not only to the target group, but also to others who may recognize the traditional forms without immediately giving them the same meaning as the target group.

In the second phase of his spiritual experience, Evert tended to overaccentuate its theatrical expressions because his aim was no

longer his self-promotion as an agent of God, but the adhesion of as many social groups as possible to his message. Of course, his target group was the elected (his own religious entourage), but he also wished to draw the other religious groups in the town. Whereas the spiritual traditions were from the very beginning easily recognized by all, Evert's major concern was now the transmission of their true meaning. Even apart from God's commission, there was also a good personal reason for his obstinacy. The passing from youth into adulthood involves entrance into public life, with an individual life project that must be acknowledged by the community (see Luke 2:46–7). Since many in Woerden still remained rather sceptical, it was vital, not only for the victory of orthodox Calvinism but also for Evert's achievement of his own personal identity, to make his experience credible to the unbelievers. Hence its second stage.

Four months after his spiritual regeneration, on a Wednesday morning, 18 January 1623, Evert got up with a severe headache. Again, he isolated himself in the particular way permitted by the close community of the orphanage. He refused to eat or drink and predicted that he would again lose the ability to hear or speak and indeed that happened about noon. This time it lasted only three days. Perhaps Evert's experience was now more intense and more exhausting (as minister Alutarius suggested), perhaps passing on his message did not need more time. Anyway, Evert now behaved in a completely different way. He was still surrounded by the group of orphans, who found this break in the daily routine extremely interesting and who perhaps shared collectively or intensified his spiritual excitement. Instead of a target group as in the first phase, the orphans were now made Evert's assistants, the new target group being the unbelievers outside. With their help providing testimonies, Evert now orchestrated public recognition of the turn in his career and in his mission. One by one he called the representatives of the various institutions which made up his social horizon into the room which had been put at his disposal. Together, they legitimized his actions for the whole town.

First came the matron as representative of the household sphere; then Evert's eldest brother as a representative of his family; the rector of the Latin school as the main agent of literate culture in the town; Evert's former employer, master tailor Gijsbert Aelbertsz; the ruling mayor, contractor Jan Florisz van Wijngaarden; and finally the minister, Domine Henricus Alutarius, in the name of the church council. The whole community, as far as it was significant

for a young man's world picture – lay and clerical, public and private – paraded symbolically past the chair from which Evert sent his messages out into the world. In the process, each was assigned a task related to his mission.

The church was never absent in those days, and certainly not at Woerden where confession was a major element of group identity. The social recognition of Evert's experience needed the approval of the ecclesiastical leaders of his group, the two orthodox Reformed ministers. Both came to see him, but only one of them was expressly summoned by Evert as his judge. This was Domine Henricus Alutarius (c. 1592–1633), a strong character, orthodox without being sectarian (as was indeed his colleague Jacobus Cralingius), an excellent theologian, popular preacher and also a practising physician.[16] We do not know for certain what he thought initially of Evert's spiritual experience, but there is no evidence of any medical treatment by the minister. In this case Alutarius's concerns were not medical but ecclesiastical. He doubted the truth of Evert's religious experience, even though – or perhaps especially because – both lived in the same sphere of orthodoxy. Would Evert's experience conform to the Calvinist canon of scriptural exegesis and could it support the interests of the orthodox party at Woerden, or was it to be combated as detrimental to the purity of faith and the cohesion of the church? And how to measure the dangers?

Domine Alutarius therefore looked for instruments, signs which could incorporate what was happening to Evert into the discourse of dogmatics and the logic of the church order. Hence his questions:

Ds Alutarius: Did the Lord make any special promise to you or any other disclosures that he will keep you alive without the usual means of eating and drinking which he wants us to use for our preservation?

Evert: Yes, he certainly did; for that is my promise from the voice that said to me that God would keep me healthy and powerful in this world; for that is spoken by the mouth of the angel who said it to me.

Ds Alutarius: In the New Testament the Lord does not speak to his people through visions and divine revelations like in the Old Testament. And the Holy Ghost warns us that we must not lightly depend on such things since there have been many who have believed them and have been deceived. Therefore, I beseech you that you ponder deeply whether you are doing

these things on a firm foundation. Especially since much will depend on it and it will be everywhere publicized; for that reason, we must act very carefully and be assured of everything before we reveal it to others. Will you repeat to me here once again what kind of outcome you think there will be for you? But take care not to strain your heart too much; better keep it for tomorrow and write it out in detail.

EVERT: What I have written is truthful, for the spirit of God is indeed in me. But I have not much read the Old and New Testaments. But what God is doing, He is doing through a punishment as an example for all people so that people will repent; for God is very angered, and that because people do not live according to his word; for God lets many miracles take place, but we cast them to the wind. So take this to heart. (B26)

Evert here puts himself emphatically in the realm of the deed. God speaks to and through him by way of reality. His miracles and the apparitions of the angel precede His words, which are nothing but explanations of what anybody is capable of seeing through his own eyes. The proof of Evert's legitimacy lies therefore in what happens to him, not in the text of the Bible, which he has hardly read. At least, so he said. And perhaps it was true in so far as his familiarity with the word of God seems more connected to oral transmission, hearing or discussion in particular situations (the tailor's workshop, the orphans' recreations, church going and catechism), than systematic.

But Evert did not avoid discussion. On the contrary, the way in which he constructed his public mission was totally directed towards a discursive, public proclamation. He had, however, learned a lesson from the first phase of his spiritual experience: the discourse could no longer come from himself, as if he were an untouchable and irrational child prodigy. On the contrary, as a candidate to adulthood he had to submit himself to the public, reasoned acknowledgement of his fellow adults. Hence the importance of the discussion about the legitimacy of his claims. Evert's second deliverance was therefore of a public nature. It still took place in the orphanage, but Evert announced it well in advance. When at a given moment he saw the other orphans gathered around the hearth fire, writing and talking, his consciousness was reactivated. He wrote on a slip of paper that the rector and the ministers should be

brought, and then he asked them all to sing together a most appropriate psalm, apparently found by opening the Bible at random: 'Out of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength' (Psalms 8:2). During the singing, Evert regained successively the use of his senses until he left the condition of babe mentioned in the psalm and sang along with the rector and the ministers as an adult.

This was sufficient proof for both ministers. On the next day, a Sunday, Evert was allowed to read in church before the whole congregation the responses of the Heidelberg catechism to the 35th question, 14th Sunday. Again a very appropriate text: 'What do we call what is received from the Holy Ghost?', for had Evert not repeatedly emphasized that the Holy Ghost was working through him? We may consider this reading as the last rite of passage which achieved Evert's official entrance into public life. From this point on, he was empowered to speak in public with adults, though this very confirmation of the change in his life's direction provoked new harsh criticism in the town.

Evert then played his last trump. Two nights later all the orphans were awakened, including Evert's two little brothers who slept in the same bed with him. Evert was talking aloud in his sleep. The matron was fetched from downstairs. Troubled, she woke him and asked whether something was wrong. Evert calmed everyone down and persuaded them to go back to bed. He had hardly gone back to sleep himself when he started speaking aloud again, as if in a dream. Pieter, five years older than he, obviously knew his younger brother's tricks. He had pen, paper and candle ready, and wrote Evert's long rhymed message down for us. The beginning and end again set the tone:

O woe, o woe, people with pride and excess,
Oh ye people mean and heartless,
Your lives today are so godless . . .
All that is spoken here
Will help you ward off sin.
Stop speaking blasphemous words;
Think before you begin.
Then God his blessing to you will give,
And I will depart eternal life to live.

(B34–5)

This dictated dream – the most classical form of a message from the hereafter, a judgment of God – brought the last Calvinist critics

over into Evert's camp. God himself had legitimized Evert's spiritual experiences and his public mission while he was unconscious. The next day the magistrate called the witnesses, including Evert's brothers, to appear before him, authenticated the whole story and gave the church council orders to have it published as quickly as possible in Amsterdam. And so it happened.

EPILOGUE

Although Evert's gradual legitimation among the dominant Calvinist party at Woerden is well documented, we know very little about his acceptance by other local confessional groups. Six years later, the Amsterdam chronicler Claes van Wassenaer (1571/2–1629), a former Calvinist preacher and also a university trained physician, argued that the whole story was a fraud and that the fasting orphan had been a simulator.[17] However, the publication of this popular chronicle did not prevent the Woerden magistracy from providing Evert Willemsz with the town scholarship at Leiden six months later, nor the Amsterdam consistory from having a very positive opinion of his abilities and sending him successively as a comforter of the sick to the Coast of Guinea in 1630 and as an ordained minister to New Netherland in 1632. The unfavourable sentence of the critical chronicler remains in a sense a mystery and we may well wonder whether this sceptic deserves more credit than the believers.

Yet, there is no trace of any sickness whatsoever in Evert's later life. On the contrary, his transitional experience made him exceptionally fit for the spiritual function of a comforter of the sick in reputedly the most murderous of all Dutch possessions, the Coast of Guinea (present-day Ghana), where he worked and studied in 1631–32. Evert's very survival of the Guinea experience suggests that he was far from having a sickly constitution. He was a strong man with a fierce temper, who in New Netherland got himself the reputation of a heavy drinker and died accidentally in a shipwreck at the age of 40. His sickness and healing in 1622–23 had been a transitory phenomenon; instruments of his maturation as an individual, images of God's intervention in human matters and metaphors of Evert's own spiritual development. His sickness in youth had been primarily a matter of his soul and a language of his mind.

It is precisely on this point that a comparison with the case of Sophia Agnes von Langenberg of Cologne is illuminating (see

Albrecht Burkardt, writing in Chapter 4 of this volume). Analysis reveals notable differences in gender, age, confession and social status between the nun of noble extraction and the tailor's apprentice living at an orphanage. But structural similarities prevail. For the awakening of their calling, the spiritual procedures corresponded in both cases with pre-established models of sanctity involving familiar metaphors and religious idioms, easy to interpret by the local community. The sense of being reborn, the conversion to a new life, was the cultural form in which this shared conviction was moulded. In both cases a two-stage model appears. First, personal holiness was achieved through a near-death experience (agony, sickness and the loss of the senses followed by ecstasy), whereas the proof of the authenticity of the subject's experience was provided by his or her miraculous healing, attributed to God's intervention. The differences are related to the idioms of holiness characteristic for each particular confession and are hence essentially accidental: for the Catholic woman redemption was achieved through the traditional devotion to Christ's Passion, and perhaps the Eucharist, while for the Protestant boy it came through the new key ritual of singing psalms.

In the second stage, after an interval which served as a time of maturation, public recognition was sought, with the help of spectacular public signs taken from the social memory that were able to suggest meaning. For the Catholic nun this was the miracle of the bleeding cross, while the Calvinist orphan – educated in a spirit of individual sanctification – returned to a more theatrical and discursive presentation of his own experience. In both cases, this second stage did not aim at the self-fashioning of the subject as a saint, but at the adhesion of the masses to the message. It turned out differently for each once they had been verified publicly (in one case by the *Nunzio*'s committee, in the other by the ministers and the town magistrate). The nun was rejected and sent back to her origins, while the boy was allowed to grow socially and spiritually. In both cases an epilogue to the second stage intended the final legitimation of the experience, at the intersection with the supernatural: demonic possession in the convent, a heavenly dream in the orphanage.

To conclude, three aspects merit particular attention in relation to gender. First, the impact of gender seems evident in the way personal 'vocation' was achieved. While young Evert constructed his own career, was authorized to express himself autonomously and was credible in himself, Sophia Agnes remained largely a victim of

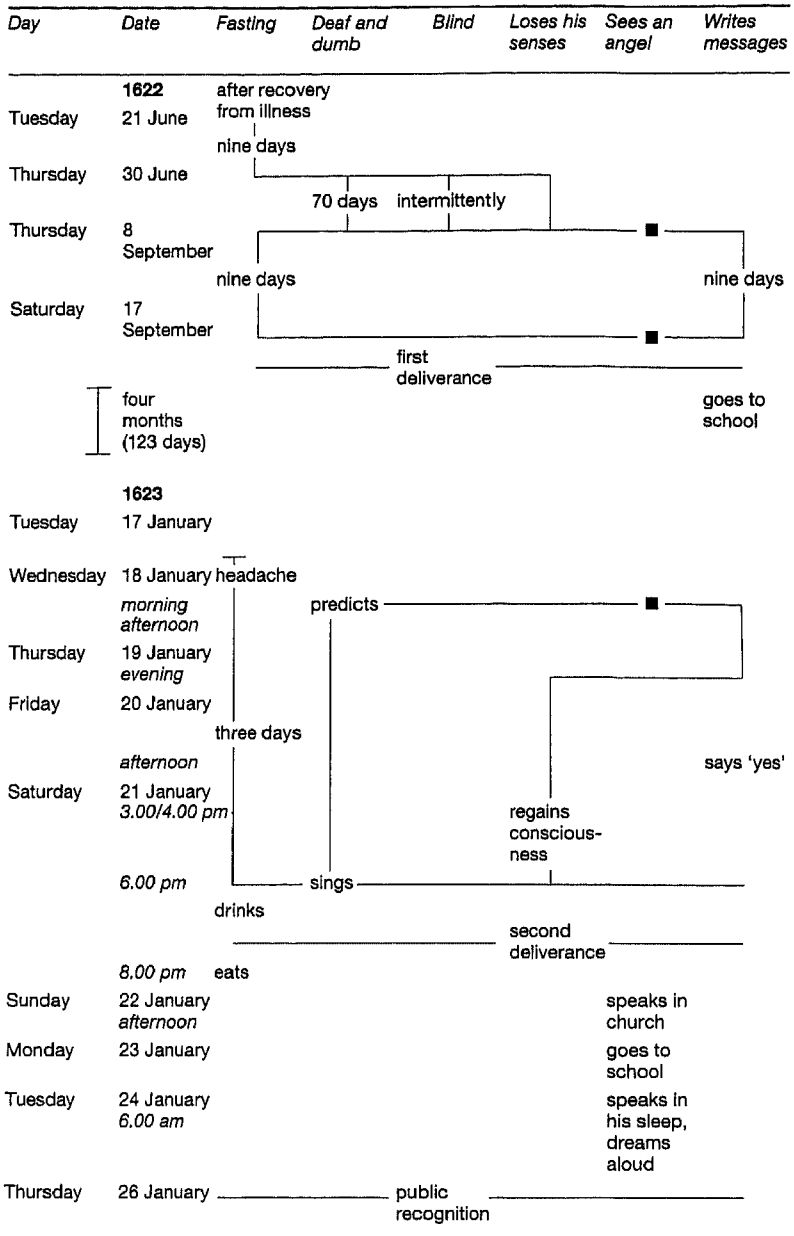
male ecclesiastical (and perhaps medical) authority. Second, in the stage of public recognition the nun appeared from the outset as a suspected fraud, whereas the boy was treated as a performer, working hard at getting a legitimation which seemed, after all, probable from the very beginning. Third, these two godly persons might well pertain to two different gender-related traditions of holiness, the nun a representative of a tradition of female sanctity, embedded in practices of suffering, self-chastising and healing, whereas the boy appeared both at Woerden and in his later American life as an active community builder of a charismatic nature. In both cases, it took the common language of sickness to reveal them to themselves and to be instrumental in the disclosure of their social calling.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For the translation of Evert's own texts in this essay I am indebted to James F. Cool of Wilmington, Ohio.

APPENDIX

Times, rhythms and modalities of Evert's spiritual experience



NOTES

1 This essay is based on the material collected for my book *Wegen van Evert Willemsz: Een Hollands weeskind op zoek naar zichzelf (1607–1647)* [Pathways of Evert Willemsz: A Dutch orphan child in search of himself, 1607–1647] (Nijmegen, 1995), where full references to all sources are given. I shall quote here only the most essential evidence.

2 Evert Willemsz's life story from the Leiden matriculation in 1627 is well known under his Latinized name Everhardus Bogardus. He died in 1647 at the age of 40 in a shipwreck off the coast of Wales, near Swansea, leaving a widow (Annetgen or Anneke Jans, a Norwegian woman) with nine children. As a central figure in the 1643–45 Indian wars, violently opposed to the disastrous policy of West India Company governor, Willem Kieft, he is one of the main characters of early New York historiography. However, the appreciation of his ministry and personality differs greatly among authors. These different images are discussed in my book. The most reliable English version of his life is in Q. Breen, 'Domine Everhardus Bogardus', *Church History*, 2 (1933): 78–90. On his New Netherland family, see G.O. Zabriskie, 'Anneke Jans in fact and fiction', *New York Genealogical and Biographical Record*, 104 (1973): 65–72, 157–64. As his family name never occurs in the Woerden sources, the story of his youth has only recently been recognized as pertaining to the same person.

3 The family relations appear in Evert's brother Cornelis Bogaert's second will, 12 Sept. 1636: Gemeentearchief Leiden, Notarieel archief, inv. no. 265, akte no. 63 [Municipal Archives of Leiden, notarial records 265, deed 63].

4 Lucas Zas [Zasch, Zasius] (ed.), *Waerachtighe ende seeckere gheschiedenisse/ dewelcke is gheschiedt binnen de Stadt Woerden/ hoe dat Godt almachtich zijn Wonder-werck heeft betoont aen een seecker Wees-kindt genaemt Evert Willemsz* (Utrecht, 1623) and *Waerachtige Geschiedenisse/ Hoe dat Seker Wees-Kindt binnen Woerden/ out ontrent xv. jaren/ tot tweemalen toe vanden Heere met stommigheyd/ doofheyd/ somtijts oock met blintheyt besocht/ ende van het gebruyck syns verstants berooft zijnde* (Amsterdam, 1623) [Den Haag, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, Pfl. Knuttel 3500–3501]. Both pamphlets have been reprinted at least once. On the pamphlet genre, see C.E. Harline, *Pamphlets, Printing and Political Culture in the Early Dutch Republic* (Dordrecht, 1987).

5 On this problem, see W. Christian Jr, *Apparitions in Late Medieval and Renaissance Spain* (Princeton, NJ, 1981), pp. 188–203; G. Zarri (ed.), *Finzione e santità tra medioevo ed età moderna* (Turin, 1991); M. Cuénin, 'Fausse et vraie mystique: signes de reconnaissance, d'après la *Correspondance* de Jeanne de Chantal', in J.-P. Massaut (ed.), *Les Signes de Dieu aux XVIe et XVIIe siècles* (Clermont-Ferrand, 1993), pp. 177–87.

6 See W. Frijhoff, 'Enfants saints, enfants prodiges: l'expérience religieuse au passage de l'enfance à l'âge adulte', *Paedagogica historica*, 29: 1 (1993): 53–76. For the vast literature on conversion models in

English and American Puritanism, the counterpart of Evert's adolescent conversion, see the surveys by L. Bergamasco, 'Hagiographie et sainteté en Angleterre', *Annales ESC*, 48: 4 (1993): 312–42; P. Caldwell, *The Puritan Conversion Narrative: The Beginnings of American Expression* (Cambridge, 1983); K. von Greyerz, *Vorsehungsglaube und Kosmologie: Studien zu englischen Selbstzeugnissen des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Göttingen and Zürich, 1990).

7 See L.F. Groenendijk and F.A. van Lieburg, *Voor edeler staat geschapen: Levens – en sterfbedbeschrijvingen van gereformeerde kinderen en jeugdigen uit de 17e en 18e eeuw* (Leiden, 1991); F.A. van Lieburg, *Levens van vromen: Gereformeerd piëtisme in de achttiende eeuw* (Kampen, 1991); L.F. Groenendijk, 'De spirituele (auto)biografie als bron voor onze kennis van de religieuze opvoeding en ontwikkeling van Nederlandse piëtisten', in L.F. Groenendijk and J.C. Sturm (eds), *Leren geloven in de Lage Landen: Facetten van de geschiedenis van de religieuze opvoeding* (Amsterdam, 1993), pp. 57–90.

8 The letters A and B after quotations in this essay refer to the pamphlets described in note 4. A refers to the Utrecht edition, B to the Amsterdam edition. They are followed by the number of the page.

9 See the depositions on Petrus Cupus and Petrus de Bricquigny, Reformed (Arminian) ministers at Woerden, in Algemeen Rijksarchief, Oud Synodaal Archief, inv. no. 157 [General State Archives at The Hague, Old Synodal Archive, 157].

10 On the 1618 comet and its meaning, see S. Drake and C.D. Malley (eds), *The Controversy on the Comets of 1618* (Philadelphia, 1960); J. Cats, *Aenmerckinghe op de tegenwoordige staert-sterre, en drie lofdichten op Philips Lansbergen*, introduced by G.J. Johannes (Utrecht, 1986); E. Jorink, 'Hemelse tekenen: Nederlandse opvattingen over de kometen van 1618', unpub. Master's thesis, University of Groningen, 1993.

11 See on the relationship between illness, healing and orthodox spirituality, A. Wear, 'Puritan perceptions of illness in seventeenth-century England', in R. Porter (ed.), *Patients and Practitioners. Lay Perceptions of Medicine in Pre-Industrial Society* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 55–99; D. Harley, 'Spiritual physic, Providence and English medicine 1560–1640', in O.P. Grell and A. Cunningham (eds), *Medicine and the Reformation* (London and New York, 1993), pp. 101–17; M.J. van Lieburg, 'Zeeuwse piëtisten en de geneeskunde in de eerste helft van de 17e eeuw: Een verkenning van het werk van W. Teellinck en G.C. Udemans', in H.J. Zuidervaart (ed.), *Worstelende wetenschap: Aspecten van de wetenschapsbeoefening in Zeeland van de zestiende tot in de negentiende eeuw* ([Middelburg], n.d. [1987]), pp. 63–86.

12 C.W. Schoneveld, *Intertraffic of the Mind: Studies in Seventeenth-Century Anglo-Dutch Translation, with a Checklist of Books Translated from English into Dutch 1600–1700* (Leiden, 1983); W.J. op 't Hof, *Engelse piëtistische geschriften in het Nederlands, 1598–1622* (Rotterdam, 1987), 441–55.

13 W. Perkins, *Salve voor een sieck mensche, ofte een tractaet vervatende de*

natuere, onderscheydentheden ende soorten des doots, trans. V. Meusevoet (Amsterdam, 1599, reprinted 1604, 1620).

14 These traditions and the way Evert Willemsz uses them are analyzed in chapters 8–11 of my book.

15 S. Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1980).

16 We know from another source that, at the same time, Alutarius was medically treating a peasant from the neighbourhood stricken with 'salvation panic'. Just like Francesco Spiera 70 years before, the peasant was convinced of being eternally damned by God and let himself die. Alutarius took him into his house, in order to observe him and to treat what he considered to be a psychic disorder. See W. Frijhoff, 'Medical education and early modern Dutch medical practitioners: towards a critical approach', in H. Marland and M. Pelling (eds), *The Task of Healing: Medicine, Religion and Gender in England and the Netherlands 1450–1800* (Rotterdam, 1996), pp. 208–10. On Spiera, see M. MacDonald, ' "The fearfull Estate of Francis Spira". Narrative, identity and emotion in early modern England', *Journal of British Studies*, 31: 1 (1992): 32–61.

17 C. van Wassenaer, *Historisch verhael alder ghedenck-weerdichste geschiedenissen, die van den beginne des jaeres 1621 . . . tot 1632 voorgevallen sijn*, 21 vols (Amsterdam, 1622–35), vol. XV (1629), fo. 64ro. Following Wassenaer, A.Th. van Deursen calls Evert 'a notorious faker', *Plain Lives in a Golden Age: Popular Culture, Religion and Society in Seventeenth-Century Holland*, trans. M. Ultee (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 257–8.